

A heart of gold

Marietta Wanopa, a dedicated humanitarian, at your service

Though a cosmetologist by profession, Marietta's heart and soul are nurtured by work that far transcends the realm of aesthetic beauty. Decorated by the Queen of the Netherlands for three decades of tireless community work including her role as Commander of Aruba's Red Cross, Marietta works with 73 trained volunteers to "add humanity" to island life.

Between the constant stream of telephone calls at her salon, Marietta explains, "We don't work only for the community – we work for everyone, wherever and whenever we are needed. From the homeless to the wealthy, everyone is treated equally. In a small community, people do not want to share their illness and misfortunes. We identify those who need assistance and target our efforts there – whether the need is ongoing or short-term. Follow-up is necessary and often includes facilitating the assistance of government agencies."

The scope of Marietta's volunteer activities is mind-boggling, ranging from providing aid and shelter to Hurricane Ivan victims, bringing on-site assistance to the fire department, and collecting clothing and baked goods for the needy, to visiting the sick at home and hospital, and cutting hair at old age homes. She organizes the Red Cross street patrols of all Carnival events; sets up aid stations for the outdoor international concerts, the annual Aruba Hi-Winds windsurfing competition and other destination events; teaches first aid, CPR, basic nursing and emergency medical treatment; is active in airport emergency simulation, represents the Red Cross in the national disaster plan; transports special groups to see the Christmas lights, and even provides fitness classes for her volunteers.

Growing up, Marietta was inspired by her mother who was active in a small local organization that lent a helping hand throughout the community. Today she recruits the help of all three generations of her family. "When I'm involved, I'm involved completely," she explains.

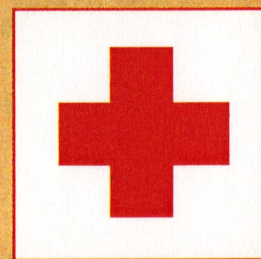


After obtaining her cosmetology license in Puerto Rico, the young Marietta began working at the Aruba Caribbean Hotel in 1965, ultimately operating her own salon there which was later relocated to the Aruba Grand Resort, formerly the Aruba Sheraton, where it has been for the past twenty-two years. Over the years, her salon has been lined with the wigs of show performers and visited by Carnival kings and queens, professional models, and thousands of tourists and locals. She has also taught many apprentices over the years. "You must not only cut hair; you are a counselor and an ambassador for the island and have to know its culture and people and provide correct information."

How does she see the future? "While adults provide support, kids can still talk better to other kids. We have to improve our communication not only with each other but also with our youth. Our Red Cross youth division should be expanded; we have to train them in necessary skills so that our work is perpetuated."

With no outside financial support, the Red Cross must now centralize and strengthen its fund raising efforts. The building which houses the Red Cross is in serious disrepair and urgently needs a new roof. Buses are needed for emergency transportation and a new ambulance is also on the must-have list of necessities.

"The world is filled with hunger and thirst, now more so since the tsunami. The dangers of terrorism lurk everywhere. The providers of aid today can become the needy recipients of tomorrow. We must learn to live together, work together, and become one community," she advises. "Whatever you do, do with your heart," Marietta suggests with a warm smile. These are not only words of advice but the recurring theme throughout her busy and fruitful life.



Red Cross

The members of the Red Cross, all volunteers who have permission to leave their places of work in an emergency, are also on-hand to assist with cruise passengers arriving in Aruba with medical needs as well as those at the airport and in the hotels.

Well-designed acrylic collection boxes with the Red Cross insignia and design are placed in locations all over the island. Your contribution is sincerely appreciated.